

TESTIMONY OF TERRY JONES, IN OPPOSITION TO BILL NO. 5078

Thank you Senator Stillman, Senator Bye, Representative Fleishmann, Representative McCrory, and distinguished members of our General Assembly's Education Committee.

My name is Terry Jones. I am a 5th-generation farmer from Shelton and descendant from a proud lineage of professional educators. I am beginning my 4th year of service on the Connecticut State Board of Education.

I do not think an outright moratorium on implementing the Common Core is prudent. I do support Governor Malloy's recent executive order for a Common Core implementation advisory group of teachers, principals, and superintendents.

I've spent a lifetime farming and coaxing strawberry plants, blueberry bushes, and Christmas trees to bring forth successful harvests. My colleagues call me "the farm guy." That might seem superfluous, but I challenge anyone to successfully teach a child who is chronically hungry.

In recent years, I have grown to better respect and appreciate public education. No longer do I think of my crops as the ultimate satisfaction. Seeing a successful teacher bring knowledge to a child is, to me, the perfect joy.

The Common Core initiative was thoughtfully created by experienced educators and was presented to the State Board of Education in December, 2009, and adopted in July, 2010. Some districts began implementing the Common Core concepts in the 2011-2012 school year, and are now progressing through their 3rd year. I applaud them! These educators realized the Common Core was not like some other fads that have come and gone in education. It was not the "flavor of the day!" It was hard work, initially, but they worked effectively in teams to make the transition, and their students are now benefiting. High praise to them!

Common Core is like a building code. These codes are common to all our towns and enable our citizens to live and work in safe structures. But, we can build them to suit our needs and not sacrifice our vision of beauty and function. In my lifetime, we have built many structures on our 400-acre farm. Indeed, each is an individual and attractive creation built to standards established by the building code. Likewise, we can build creative and challenging curriculums under the building code of Common Core.

A math teacher recently said to me, "The Common Core is the sanest change to math standards in 15 years." Kids were being taught math in shallow, 3-week segments, so that at year's end they would know "a little bit about everything." By trying to teach kids everything every year, we see them move up the grade ladder without a real sense of how to use numbers. As an employer, I have been dismayed at the growing number of youngsters in recent years not knowing their number skills by the time they join our teenage workforce each summer. Common Core helps our students dive deep into the waters of understanding, rather than slip-sliding around in studies that are "a mile wide and an inch deep."

The districts that are embracing and implementing Common Core can take pride in the gift of deeper learning they're giving their children. They are preparing their students to be successful in the job market and productive citizens of our society. School districts not embracing the Common Core are doing a disservice to their students by not seeking to provide them the most relevant education for these challenging times.

My State Board of Education colleagues share that passion and the belief that in Connecticut's education system, every child is important and no child should be a casualty.